

NCC Parkway and Planning Guidelines, 2024

Safety is the Priority

Introduction

Ottawa's Kitchissippi Ward is home to two parkways (Island Park Drive and the Kitchi Zibi Mikan Parkway) and one large federal complex (Tunney's Pasture) which is currently undergoing a fundamental transformation. All 46,000 residents will be affected, to one extent or another, by the implementation of the new parkway and planning guidelines. It is essential that the NCC gets this right.

The Champlain Park Community Association represents some 500 City of Ottawa households within the following boundaries:

- Pontiac Street / Sir John A. MacDonald Parkway corridor (North)
- Amanda Avenue/ Transitway / Scott Street - (South)
- Northwestern Avenue / Tunney's Pasture (East)
- Patricia Avenue / Island Park Drive (West)

Scott Street is a large municipal corridor. It is almost at full capacity at its western end. The federal lands on our other three sides include two of the NCC parkways identified under this policy. Consequently, policies and decisions regarding these parkways have a direct, lasting, and currently dire impact upon the community.

Transformational changes are needed to deal with the significant, ever-increasing challenges faced by our community and by other local communities. Doing little or nothing is not an option.

The Champlain Park Community Association looks forward to working with the NCC on the revision of the parkway and planning guidelines in a constructive, open and transparent manner. Ours is a long-established community and many of our residents have decades of lived experience with the parkways. We look forward to meeting with the NCC to discuss the many opportunities and challenges.

Recommendation:

Establish a working committee consisting of key players from all responsible levels of government and Kitchissippi residents, to develop action and implementation plans for short, medium and long term resolutions.

2. Documentation consulted

We first reviewed the following NCC documentation:

- Plan for Canada's Capital, 2017-2067
- Policy for Parkways and Driveways (1984)
- Capital Pathway Strategic Plan
- Other documents on the NCC website regarding pedestrian safety on the pathways

We then referred to two documents that were submitted to the NCC's 2014 Draft Updated Policy for Parkways:

- Comments by the Champlain Park Community Association (CPCA)
- Comments by Roland Dorsay, a long-time resident, with the support of the Island Park Community Association (IPCA) Board.
- The above two documents are attached as Appendices, for your convenience.

The NCC's 2014 Draft Policy and the resulting What We Heard report are no longer accessible on the NCC website. We would appreciate information on the status of this draft policy.

We note that a few improvements have been made to the Kitchi Zibi Pathway.

However, our previous comments regarding Island Park Drive are for the most part still valid, with one major exception: what we experience now is now much, much, worse and the need to mitigate the damage is urgent. Minimal improvements have included widened bike lanes, flex posts and the installation of a two-way on-demand crosswalk at Clearview and Island Park. Unfortunately, the crosswalk is unsafe. It does not meet the needs of the communities on both sides of Island Park Drive, OC Transpo or school bus drivers serving St. George's School. The community had requested, and was promised, a four-way signalised intersection.

3. The Vision and the parkway and planning guidelines

The Guidelines are well-considered. How and when they are implemented is critical. We need to know the details. And, there are some simple and low-cost safety measures that **MUST** be implemented immediately.

4. Safety as the top priority

The guidelines are largely about the "Freedom to Move", which is a fundamental human right. Safety is foundational to the Freedom to Move. But there can be no Freedom to Move and no equitable access, until all modes of transportation are safe for all users, according to their abilities.

It was worrisome, therefore, when we heard at the September 12, 2024 consultation session that the goals related to safety are “aspirational”. We understand that this is a large, complex project, with the federal government, two provinces and two municipalities being involved to varying extents. **Regardless, safety must always be the top priority.** Work to identify and start implementing safety measures must begin now. Waiting until all the to-be-determined necessary pieces are in place endangers the public.

The NCC will realize its goal to provide an “inviting, welcoming, equitable and inclusive access to all, irrespective of gender, age, ability and origin” only when the required safety measures have been implemented.

Recommendations:

- **Give priority to developing and budgeting for a safety plan for each parkway. Give priority to implementing low cost items as soon as possible.**
- **Improve safe access to the Kichi Zibi Mikan pathway (lower cost, can be implemented quickly):**
 - **Via the Carleton Avenue underpass: using the existing path, create segregated paths for cyclists and pedestrians to minimize the increasing conflicts.**
 - **Via the northeast sweeper lane to the Champlain Bridge, improve pedestrian safety by installing a flashing caution signal. Painted lines at a busy merge lane are not enough.**

The 2020 Capital Pathway Strategic Plan incorporated increased safety measures for the pathways. It addressed the significant safety concerns raised in consultation sessions regarding safety on the pathways and developed a plan of action. While some improvements, such as segregated lanes, will be costly, some of the other measures such as signage and public education - and, most important, enforcement - can and should be implemented now.

Pedestrian safety along the Kichi Zibi Mikan pathway is seriously compromised because of unsafe behaviour by cyclists. Residents in Champlain Park, including seniors and families with young children, report having given up walking there, because they consider it to be too dangerous. The lack of safety interferes with their freedom to move and prioritizes the rights of cyclists and unsafe behaviour over the more vulnerable users of the pathway.

Recommendation:

- **Enforce the NCC code of conduct now, so that all pathway users are safe. Elderly people, children and people with limited mobility are particularly vulnerable and in need of accommodation.**

5. Parkways as part of a regional network north and south of the Ottawa River

While the parkways have, for the most part, been envisaged and developed as scenic, not commuter routes, the reality is different. Decades of uncoordinated transportation planning and implementation between various levels of government have resulted in traffic chaos. No new roads will be built. Our bridges are seriously over-capacity. Given the expected high rates of future population growth on both sides of the river, the lack of interprovincial bridges west of the Champlain Bridge, the lack both of speedy north/south transit options and east/west BRT / LRT transit options outside of the eventual LRT routes, cars will remain the only viable mode of transportation for most people.

Another major concern is that most of the parkway and Island Park Drive are inside the boundaries of Ottawa's Drinking Water Intake Protection Zone. Vehicle exhaust, particulates from the breakdown of tires and brake pads and other pollutants all are flushed into and / or dissolved into the potable water supply.

Rapid population growth has already resulted in severe congestion everywhere. We need a practical and balanced approach that considers current realities. This approach must be coordinated with the transportation plans and challenges of other levels of government.

Recommendations:

- **Proceed as quickly as possible with plans for more bridges, considering current capacity, current demand, and projected demand.**
- **Consider as a medium term measure, adding an access to the Queensway at the western end of the parkway, concurrently with the following:**
 - **Conduct a feasibility study to determine the impacts of dedicating one lane of the parkway to two-way car traffic and the second to cycle, scooter and other active transportation traffic.**

6. Full-day Bike Days on the Kichi Zibi Mikan Pathway

A number of our association members have complained that many cyclists still choose to use the pathways – at speed - even when the parkway is closed to cars.

Current signage at the intersection of Island Park Drive and the parkway funnels interprovincial traffic along Island Park Drive. Full-day Bike Days have added to the already unacceptable burden for the communities to the south of the Champlain Bridge. The recent decision on the part of the NCC to retain full-day Bike Days, rather than revert to the pre-Covid half days on the Kichi Zibi Mikan parkway, without any mitigating measures or consultation with affected communities, has created havoc. This is particularly evident at the North end of Island Park Drive and in the surrounding communities of Westboro Beach and Champlain Park, but it also affects other communities adjacent to Island Park Drive. A resident from Westboro comments:

I live very near IPD and Scott Street and I see the traffic problem every day. (When traffic) starts to go into the local roads that are not designed for those volumes it needs to be addressed.

The result: high levels of air pollution and deposition of pollutants into the interiors of the communities; noise pollution from blaring sound systems, car horns, and idling cars and motorcycles; congestion that often extends south as far as the Queensway off ramp and that prevents residents from going about their daily lives; and, dangerous cut-through traffic by impatient, angry drivers, who are looking for a faster, illegal (but unenforced) route to the Champlain Bridge. At times, emergency vehicles are blocked.

It is not uncommon for cut-through drivers in Champlain Park, where line-ups can extend from the intersection at Northwestern / Scott St to the Clearview / Island Park Drive intersection, to leave the line-up and speed up other north/south streets looking for any exit that saves them having to brave the intersection at Scott St. / Island Park Drive.

This is supposed to be a traffic-calmed neighbourhood. It is a 15-minute neighbourhood whose residents walk. There are many children, many on bicycles. We sympathise with cyclists who want full-day access to the Parkway on weekends. But without appropriate controls in place, this access compromises the health and safety of residents in the abutting communities and on Island Park Drive. Children going to and from our neighbourhood park, which is at the corner of Clearview and Carleton, are particularly at risk. And the cost of doing nothing has an impact not only on our residents, but also on our neighbours from Quebec, who are forced to park for long periods, engines running, on Island Park Drive and our neighbourhood streets.

Recommendations:

- **Conduct a full assessment of the use of the parkway and the pathways by cyclists, in relation to both the needs of pedestrians and the reality of traffic gridlock.**
- **Balance the needs of cyclists with reality. Three suggestions are:**
 - **Consider closing the pathway to cyclists (except for families with young children) during Bike Day hours, to give pedestrians a safe space to walk.**
 - **Consider allowing two-way traffic in a single lane during Bike Day hours.**
- **Give priority to assessing the vehicle spillover effects on neighbourhoods and Island Park Drive, and develop measures to mitigate them.**
- **Revert to half-day bike days. The environmental costs of maintaining the status quo are too high, as is the cost to the neighbourhoods who experience the havoc caused by full day Bike Days weekend after weekend, and large amounts of cut-through traffic every other day of the week.**

7. Island Park Drive is a failed street.

Island Park is unique among NCC parkways. It has stately homes with front lawns, gardens, mature trees and driveways along its entire length. But it also has become a commuter route between Quebec and Ontario. It experiences greater traffic volume and gridlock than any of the other parkways. But for the excessive traffic, it would be an ideal, walkable street on which people could stroll during our now normal extended heat waves, and would meet the established criteria for an NCC parkway. Currently, the volume of vehicles and their emissions make this impossible.

Island Park Drive exceeded its traffic design capacity decades ago. Rush hour occupies almost all day, every day. Cars are often backed up late into the night. Emergency vehicles have difficulty navigating through the congestion.

The NCC's decision not to renew the Covenants that shaped the development of the street, combined with the Provincial law allowing three dwelling units on each lot and the City of Ottawa's New Official Plan which allows more, puts the historical and cultural landscape of the street at risk. King Edward Avenue downtown is a cautionary tale, showing how a street deteriorates when it is dedicated to vehicles and not people.

Decades of neglect have made Island Park Drive a failed street. The signs that this was going to happen were evident a long time ago. They were ignored. We refer you to the comments in the two appendices for more details.

- The street needs to be made safer. There are many accidents.
- Traffic calming, especially at every intersection, is needed. Despite the improvements to the Scott Street / Island Park intersection, it remains dangerous.

The recommendations of 1998 Braaksma Report, "Island Park, Kirkwood and Churchill Transportation and Calming Plan" commissioned by the ROC and the City of Ottawa were accepted enthusiastically by all participants, including municipal officials and community associations, though not by the NCC. Acceptance and implementation of the recommendations for Island Park Drive would have contributed significantly to safety, improved environmental quality and the scenic beauty of the street.

We recognize that commuter traffic on IPD will only become heavier and less safe as population grows on both sides of the river. A western bridge is unlikely for many years, if ever. However, this situation does not give the NCC a green light to wait. They are responsible for the management of the Island Park Drive, and safety must be their highest concern.

Recommendations:

- **Ensure the historical and cultural landscape of the street is protected.**
- **Review the traffic calming recommendations of the Braaksma Report with a view to updating and implementing its recommendations. It is not too late to do so.**
- **https://app06.ottawa.ca/calendar/ottawa/archives/rmoc/Regional_Council/25Feb98/Island.pdf**
- **Give priority to fixing the intersections.**
- **Enforce the traffic rules in a consistent manner.**
- **Install a four-way signalized traffic light at Clearview and Island Park Drive. This is the only safe solution according to the traffic experts at the RCMP. Failure to provide safe passage through the new two-way on-demand crosswalk (as noted above, we asked for traffic lights) denies pedestrians and cyclists, and especially seniors and students, their freedom to move.**
- **Install synchronized traffic lights at all existing signalised intersections and 4-way signalised crossings at Iona and Clearview, to ensure that traffic flows efficiently and pedestrians, busses and cyclists can cross the street safely.**
- **At Iona and Clearview, the signal should only allow traffic to go straight through the intersection (a “no turns allowed” arrow). A highly visible traffic camera or some other form of traffic control and management also would deter drivers from cutting through communities on both sides of Island Park Drive.**
- **Work proactively with other levels of government to ensure traffic mitigation initiatives are coordinated, to minimize disruption.**
- **Consult with the affected communities. Keep them informed as plans solidify.**